

NEW PUBLICATIONS.

THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE.

THE STORY OF TURKEY. By Stanley Lane-Poole, assisted by E. J. W. Gibb and Arthur Gilman. With illustrations. 12mo, pp. 353. G. P. Putnam's Sons.

Mr. Lane-Poole has perhaps done as much as any one could in the impossible task of giving, within the limits of a small volume, a sufficient account of the rise and decline of the Ottoman Empire. It is necessarily little more than a skeleton history, and the life of the Turkish people is not illustrated at all, while the barest reference is permitted to that great and dominant question of religion which is and always has been the master-key to Ottoman policy and progress, or want of progress. The development and growth of the Ottoman Power from very small beginnings is not indeed especially wonderful since nearly all the great empires of the past arose in the same manner, and all the empires of the East had like origins. When might have made more openly than at any later period, the success of any nation depended chiefly upon its military capacity. The Ottomans adopted some peculiar principles which from an early stage of their career gave them the immense advantage of stability in government. The institution of a force composed wholly of aliens, taken captive in childhood, educated to arms, and to forget their origin, and charged, when arrived at maturity, with the care of the sovereign's person and the conduct of the decisive movements in battle, gave to the Ottoman Sultans a protection against ordinary Oriental treachery and intrigue which enabled them to consolidate their conquests and to maintain a single dynasty for centuries upon the throne.

The Janissaries in time became a menace to the Empire, and their destruction was necessary. They were inevitably demoralized and corrupted by the honors and privileges of their position. Their career followed the line of the Praetorian Guard's turbulent evolution. From being an invaluable instrument in the hands of the Sultans they became the tyrants of their nominal lords, and, at last, like their Roman prototypes, they aspired to rule, pulled down and set up sovereigns, broke into riot whenever their audacious projects were traversed, and forced the issue of their extermination upon the Government. But it is to be observed that the steady and continued expansion of the Ottoman Empire was only made possible by the security these alien mercenaries gave to the ruling family. Had there been no Janissaries we may be certain that palace revolutions, complicated with brigandage, would have introduced confusion and hindered state aggrandizement there as in all other Oriental countries, and in that case the Ottoman Empire would have soon been extinguished centuries ago, and the whole course of European history would have been changed. As it was, a time came when it seemed quite possible that the Turk would make himself the master of Europe; when no power that could be mustered was capable of turning back the Ottoman hordes, and the cross appeared to be gazing before the crescent.

This was not to be, and when the Grand Turk was at the zenith of his power the virtue began to depart from his arms. It is an old and monotonous story, a repetition of examples in natural law which the world is slow in apprehending. The Turk was a magnificent fighting machine at the time when fighting was the most necessary means of empire building. Therefore, the Turk founded a great empire. He could not maintain his conquests, because he had adopted a religion which was at war with natural development. That religion favored the race, prevented it from advancing, nourished its most conservative tendencies, stunted its intellectual growth, and by keeping it in a state of barbarism, promoted the increase of those corrupt forms of government which sooner or later turned all its foundations to desperate rebels, and rotted the bonds of empire. As to the cruelty of the Turks, it has been much overstated. They were not more ferocious than their European neighbors, as a rule. They believed in a "thorough" war policy, and it was the custom when a Sultan ascended the throne for him to kill all his brothers and other possible heirs. Attempts to follow this summary policy were, however, formerly made in several European countries, and the history of England has many examples of the kind. The bravery and severity of the Turkish people have always been celebrated. No race ever possessed more sterling natural gifts, and down to this day the fighting power of the Ottomans remains undiminished, as the Russians discovered to their cost at Pleven, where they lost fifty thousand of the flower of their troops, and if report at the time was trustworthy, finally owed more to their gold than their guns in securing Osman Pacha's surrender. Not that here was venal. It was the pachas between him and Constantine, who were charged with renewing his wasted supplies of ammunition and food, upon whose heads rumor fastened the treason of that occasion.

A chapter might profitably have been given to the rays of life of the Turkish masses, and to the influence of Islam upon national existence. It is quite impossible to obtain a clear understanding of the situation without some study of popular manners and customs, and since Mr. Lane-Poole is familiar with the subject, as few living writers can claim to be, it is the more to be regretted that he did not undertake this slight extension of his work. What Mr. W. G. Palgrave did for Central Asia requires to be done for Turkey, and until it is done some indispensable data for forming a judgment upon Ottoman history will be wanting. Mr. Lane-Poole in this volume gives much interesting description of the palace government in Istanbul, though the greater part of it refers to extinct arrangements and ceremonies, and very little is told of modern Turkey. In a work of the kind no discussion of the Eastern Question was to have been expected, nor are such discussions usually profitable, save when undertaken by some acknowledged authority like Lord Stratford de Redcliffe. Mr. Lane-Poole, however, ventures to intimate his confidence in Ottoman valor by suggesting a doubt whether, if the Porte were perfectly untrammelled, and Russia given full scope for aggression, it is an absolute certainty that the Czar would be proclaimed on the Bosphorus. Of course every one is at liberty to think as he chooses upon this point, but there is certainly no room for doubt as to the practical dispossession of the Turk in Europe, and the shrinkage of his dominions to limits so pitiful that unless there occurs a great reversion of Mohammedanism, it is scarcely conceivable that the obsequies of the "sick man" should be much longer postponed.

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